



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

A FREUDIAN PERSPECTIVE ON COLONIALISM IN HEART OF DARKNESS

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Uppsats/Examensarbete:	15 hp
Program och/eller kurs:	EN1311 In-depth Course in English, Literary Research Project
Nivå:	First Cycle
Termin/år:	Spring Semester 2015
Handledare:	Margrét Gunnarsdottir Champion
Examinator:	Chloé Avril
Rapport nr:	xx (ifylles ej av studenten/studenterna)

Abstract: This essay argues that Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* in order to shed light on what terrible crimes were committed in the colonies and what horrible things man is capable of. Further the essay attempts to show that Conrad wanted to reach his readers on a deeper level, and thus the novel is not propaganda but can be regarded as ambiguous. In the novel, the protagonist, Marlow, embarks on a journey that turns out to be much more of an inner than an outer journey. The essay shows that Conrad implicates his readers in Marlow's journey and challenges their views along with Marlow. Conrad wishes for his novel to make an imprint in the time and place where the reading takes place. By comparing the experiences of the two main characters, Marlow and Kurtz (the second protagonist), the essay underlines the importance of self-knowledge as a theme in the novel. Additionally, the issue of racism will be discussed since it is impossible to omit racism when studying *Heart of Darkness*.

I have studied the novel from a Freudian psychological perspective. The psychological approach seems suitable, since this is a tale where our different levels of consciousness, what is unknown to us within us, our psychological energy and strengths, are of great importance.

The main reason for writing this essay is to contribute to a better understanding of the purpose of the novel and to encourage readers of *Heart of Darkness* to draw parallels with today's exploitation of the developing countries and their people.

Keywords: imperialism, colonialism, restraint, self-knowledge, unconscious, racism

He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them – the ship; and so is their country – the sea. (HoD 3)

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to... (HoD 6)

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Introduction

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) became a British subject in 1886 when Queen Victoria was on the throne. The Victorian values contained a very low tolerance for crime, strict codes of conduct and sexual restraint. This was a time when religion was highly valued and when industrialization and a belief in progress reached into all areas of the British Empire, which amounted to 25% of the world. The political view on colonization is well explained by Ian Watt: “in the nineteenth century no real political alternative had been suggested to Western penetration of the other continents; the only practical issue was what form it should take” (Watt 159). It is good to have this in mind when reading *Heart of Darkness*. At the time the novel was written, the average reader regarded the white man as superior to all other humans, and naturally his or her sympathies lay with the Europeans. However, the very aim of the novel was to change this view by letting “the effect of Marlow’s examples [...] render unsustainable the glib designation of ‘us’ as civilized and them as savage. The personal voyage upon which Marlow has embarked is one of disenchantment, from which late-nineteenth-century racial views of culture would not return” (Simmons 48).

The novel deals with Marlow who is hired by a trading company to sail up a river in Africa to rescue an agent by the name of Kurtz. In the beginning of the novel, Marlow sits with his friends on the deck of a yawl and tells the story about his experience. He hesitates in doing so because the tale implies grave criticism of both imperialism and colonialism. When Marlow arrives in Africa he understands that the noble values so well formulated in Europe are only hypocrisy and the only reason for the Europeans being in Africa is to exploit the continent for their own benefit. Kurtz, on the other hand, had come out with the best intentions but was unprepared for what he encounters. He was neither a hypocrite nor had he the inner strength to sustain restraint towards suppressed urges unknown to him, when left alone in the wilderness. Marlow rescues him in the end of the story but Kurtz dies on their way back. In the end of the novel, Marlow visits Kurtz’s Intended to give her letters and personal papers. She has not met the man Kurtz had become but knew only the man he was before going out to Africa. Marlow who hates lies, makes an exception and lies to her when she asks for Kurtz’ last word. Marlow says it was her name when instead it was “The horror! The horror!” (HoD 91).

For some time now, there has been an on-going discussion about ethical questions in connection with merchandise produced by Western companies in the developing world. The discussion raises matters such as working conditions, child labour and environmental issues. I will argue that some of these questions were already raised by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. Furthermore, I will argue that Conrad considered imperialism destructive not only for the people who are oppressed but also for the oppressors. Marlow feels ambiguous about what he experiences in Africa. He realizes what has become of the colonizers in Africa, “To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than

there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid the expenses of the noble enterprise I don't know; but the uncle of our manager was the leader of the lot" (HoD 37). In this quotation one can identify a change of personality in these gentlemen, different from their European self. Thus, this shows that a Freudian perspective on *Heart of Darkness* is a productive one since it provides explanation models for the development of the characters in the novel.

In the early 20th century Freud published his theories on psychoanalysis. According to Freud the human mind can be seen as organized in three different levels. The conscious mind deals with our experiences in a rational way. The preconscious mind is the part of the mind that contains ordinary memories that easily can be brought into the conscious mind. The unconscious mind is the part of our mind that contains repressed feelings and unacceptable urges. Here, we find things that we ourselves are not aware of. Freud explains this by saying "that we have two different kinds of unconscious – the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious" (Freud 335).

Freud also stated that each person possesses psychological energy that forms the personality: the id, the ego and the super-ego. The id seeks immediate gratification; the ego deals with reality and adjusts the urges of the id to acceptable manners, combined they form "a coherent organization of mental process; and we can call this his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to motility – that is, to the discharge of excitations into the external world" (Freud 335).

According to Freud, within each and every one of us there is a super-ego. The super-ego represents demands from parents, laws that should be obeyed, rules and regulations. The super-ego is internal and is a contrast to the id: "whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world of the reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflicts between the ego and the ideal will, as we are now prepared to find, ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is psychical, between the external world and the internal world" (Freud 376).

Since Freud had an intellectual impact on the era in which the novel was written, it is in my opinion interesting to examine the novel from a psychoanalytic perspective. One cannot know if Conrad had Freud in mind when creating his characters but the two main characters in the novel, Kurtz and Marlow, have to face knowledge that is revealed to them from their unconscious and this makes a Freudian approach useful. Hence, the concept of self-knowledge is an important issue in the novel. Is it possible to gain self-knowledge from others? The colonizers are worth studying for different reasons. What happens to people when they become distant in time and place from the institutions that have created their super-ego? Will they be true to their values or were these values mere pretence and never integrated in their true self? According to Freud, illness or distress will contract unless there is balance between the

individual's id, ego and super-ego. People in the Victorian period lived with strong super-egos since the moral code was strict. How did these individuals react when given freedom to use military power with no one to control them in the colonies? The native Africans lived by their codes, which, of course, were very difficult for the white people to understand since they did not have a language in common and were ignorant about non-European cultural legacies.

In order to understand the novel it is just as important to have an understanding of the background of Joseph Conrad as of the time. He lived his adolescent life at sea and was by his own definition "a Polish nobleman, cased in British tar" (Simmons 4). He was more or less stateless since he was Polish by origin and Poland was colonized by Russia and part of the Ukraine. He lost both his parents before the age of eleven and was very critical towards all kinds of colonization. Thus, his feelings towards the British Empire were double-edged.

Conrad's morals and ethics were formed as a seaman. On a ship, hard work, camaraderie, the ability to endure the situation and restraint are qualities much appreciated. The cultural origin of people is of less importance. Conrad expresses this in *Heart of Darkness*: "I don't like work – no man does - but I like what is in the work – a chance to find yourself" (35). These were some of the values much appreciated in the Victorian time. But Conrad discovered that these values only applied to white, British subjects and this came as a shock to him. He could not help himself from reflecting that the values he held high did not apply to all people but only to a chosen few.

When Conrad shifted his career from a seaman to a writer, he had very clear notions about art. He thought that art was a way to reach people on a deep psychological level and make them think differently. If readers are reached on this deep level the effect will endure. In the preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus* Conrad writes

But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition –and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation; and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts; to that solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspiration, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which bind together all humanity—the dead to the living, and the living to the unborn. (NoN 145)

Heart of Darkness was first published in 1899 and was at once recognized as an important piece of work. Most readers and critics saw the novel as an adventure novel. The harsh criticism of the free Congo state was noticed, but that the novel should criticise imperialism in general was not obvious.

Throughout the years, Conrad's work has been studied within such diverse fields as feminism, symbolism, Marxism, post-structuralism and, of course, post-colonialism. Simmons sums up the post-colonial critique: "The novella invites a critique of the colonial system, and the narrative is seen to be characterized by an implicit unease about the assumptions on which

the colonial exploitation is founded” (Simmons 101). Among the most famous responses to the novel is the African writer Chinua Achebe who calls Conrad “a thorough going racist” in his article “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (Achebe 257). Cedric Watts stands up for Conrad in his article “‘A Bloody Racist’: About Achebe’s View of Conrad”. Frances B. Singh contributes to the discussion with a more balanced view in “The Colonialist Bias of *Heart of Darkness*” where she states that “a story that was meant to be a clear-cut attack on a vicious system [turns] into a partial apology for it” (Singh 280). This shows the ambiguity of the novel and that readers have interpreted *Heart of Darkness* in many different ways.

The first chapter in this essay studies how a strong super-ego influences the people and their actions. I will show how Marlow finds it difficult to criticize the prevailing system even to his close friends and how he begins to feel uneasy about the job he is taking on already before going out to Africa. He feels the pressure of the super-ego and is not comfortable with that.

The second chapter discusses how the people in the outer and central station deal with the reality. They can be seen as the ego that is squeezed between the demands of the super- ego and the urges of the id. Here, the super-ego does not represent a healthy role model. In this chapter I will also discuss racism. Racism can be seen as a way for the ego to deal with consequences of colonisation.

The third chapter looks at what may happen to people who have been raised with a strong super-ego when they are let loose from it. Have they strength enough to follow their intensions or will they succumb to repressed urges from their id that they never have been allowed to admit and discuss? Without a firm self-knowledge it is easy to make the wrong choices.

Chapter 1: Western Europe and the Super-ego

The novel starts in a calm and comforting setting in beautiful surroundings with four friends on board a cruising yawl, *The Nellie*. The *Nellie* could be seen as a safety valve or a psychologist's consulting room where Marlow can seek an outlet for the memories that haunt him. Marlow is aware that the tale he is about to tell will go against the norms and might not be well received by his friends. The members of his audience are not named but instead described by their present professions: the lawyer, the accountant and the director. I think this is done to illustrate what Marlow was up against, the institutions in society that form our super-ego. Anyhow, these men were former seamen and they shared with Marlow the moral codes of life at sea and he hoped that they would both listen and understand. He felt safe with them as a patient with his therapist. Thus, this situation illustrates the ambiguity that will emerge throughout the novel.

The super-ego is the part of our psychology that makes us follow rules and regulations, the demands that we have upon us to act according to the accepted codes of our society. To go against this takes a great deal of courage. This chapter will explain the strong influence of the super-ego on the colonisers and what happens to people who follow their super-ego although they do it against their own true self. This creates "conflicts between the ego and the ideal will, as we are now prepared to find, ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is psychical between the external world and the internal world" (Freud 376).

Already, before Marlow starts to tell his tale, the mood in the story changes as the sun sets. It takes the form of a dream and the reader senses that it will not be a pleasant dream. Conrad describes the scenery as: "The air was dark above Gravesend, and further back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest town on earth" (HoD 1). The darkness is closing in. London can be seen as an embodiment of the super-ego that prevents Marlow from telling his tale. Marlow speaks of "all the men of whom the nation is proud from Sir Frances Drake to Sir John Franklin" (HoD 3). Even if these two men have accomplished a lot, they are still much debated. Sir Frances Drake was without a doubt a privateer and a slaver. Sir John Franklin led expeditions that ended in misery and even cannibalism. In my opinion, these lines should be recognized as devastating irony.

Marlow describes the increasing uneasiness he feels when he arrives in Brussels. He is used to London and the restraint London has upon him. However, he finds Brussels even worse and calls it "the sepulchral city" (HoD 9). This description may have many references but one very obvious is that the wealth of Brussels was founded on bones, first and foremost, ivory that comes from dead elephants, although elephants are not once mentioned in the novel. But there is also a metaphoric way of connecting Brussels with all the lives that have been sacrificed for the wealth of the city, lives of both white and black people. However, there is a third and even more important reason for calling the city "sepulchral". Marlow regards the people in Brussels

as living dead. According to Freud, a person becomes ill when the different levels of consciousness are not integrated with each other. If feelings are repressed into the unconscious to adjust to the super-ego, the ego becomes a marionette. Some colonialists accepted to become marionettes in order to earn money and this was one of the reasons that they fell ill and had to return home. The demand to make money in the colonies was strong, whatever the cost. The natives paid the highest price. The colonizers justified their wicked deeds through talking about the development and education of Africa. They knew the rhetoric was not true and this made most of them hollow and deprived of all joy of life. Only the true psychopaths got away.

On the other hand, when Philip V. Allingham discusses Marlow's attitude towards Brussels he says "Marlow values European colonialism as stabilizing" (Allingham 2). However, he refers to passages in the novel that take place before Marlow has arrived in Africa such as "There was a vast amount of red – good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there" (HoD 10). The colour red marked British areas on maps from this time. Marlow has a great interest in maps and looks at the maps in the company office to explore the situation. He is proud to be a British subject and is yet unaware of what he is going to meet in the colonies. He is going to areas that are unknown to him and knowing that he should be relatively close to British territory makes him feel safer. In addition, Allingham states that "Marlow sees the system as setting a positive constraint ("a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another") (HoD 61) to individual conduct" (Allingham 2). As I interpret this quotation from *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow merely explains how difficult it is for his audience to understand what he has been through and experienced. When everything is already arranged by those in charge, not much is requested of the individuals, and therefore the challenges that Marlow meets in Africa can be hard to understand. If there is a butcher round the corner one does not need to go crazy out of hunger. If one can contact the police when threatened, one can feel safe. On the other hand, in Africa everything is up to the individual and if one cannot face the challenges, things can go wrong.

In my opinion, Conrad didn't find the imperialistic system positive at all. He thinks that people should be brought up so their values are integrated in their true self and if they are, there is no need for a strong control function of the super-ego. A strong control function is only necessary when people are forced to repress their true feelings and live by rules that they do not stand by. If one lives in that way, one becomes hollow at the core, one will lack backbone and guts and eventually turn into a living dead. This is how he regards many of the people in the sepulchral city and many of the "pilgrims" in Africa. They suppressed their true feelings under the control of the super-ego to such a great extent that they seemed like hollow ghosts. This is how he describes the brick maker at the central station, "I let him run on this papier-mâché Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and find nothing inside but a little loose dirt maybe" (HoD 32).

Heart of Darkness shows that the colonial trading company deceives their employees and people in Europe. The uneasiness that Marlow feels increases when he has to sign documents in Brussels about not giving away trade secrets. He is not used to these kinds of ceremonies and feels as if led into a conspiracy. The company hides behind the lie of doing well. The good-hearted and gullible people believe them, while others are well aware that this is sheer hypocrisy. Kurtz and Marlow's aunt belong to the good-hearted people although there is a clear distinction between them. The aunt believes that the company is contributing to the development of Africa. Kurtz suspects that this is not so and he wants to change the way things are run. He declares that "[e]ach station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanising, improving, instructing" (HoD 41). Later on, we find out that Kurtz has been misled. The natives will not be enlightened but rather Kurtz himself and Marlow. Both will find out what is going on in Africa and what is hiding deep down within themselves.

The company people, who understand how things are run, act accordingly and speak of the noble cause when in Europe, although they are aware that the only aim is to make profit. In the novel one can clearly see how the power of the super-ego stretches out to Africa but the effort to keep up appearances becomes weaker the further out the company people come. In the outer station, they are all making a point of things being in good order. This continues at the central station but here the hypocrisy becomes obvious. Conrad shows this by letting Marlow overhear a conversation between the Manager of the central station and his uncle who has come in with an expedition. They talk about Kurtz whom they regard as unfair competition since he has different moral values:

"We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example," he said. "Certainly, grunted the other: get him hanged! Why not? Anything – anything can be done in this country. That's what I say; nobody here, understand, *here*, can endanger your position. And why? You stand the climate – you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to-." (HoD 41)

The super-ego is in control in Europe, but lacks control in Africa. Here the ego can choose to disregard the demands of the super-ego and instead follow its own empathy or greed.

At the end of the novel, Marlow comes back from Africa to Brussels, quite a different person and this is how he now describes being in Brussels. In my opinion this paragraph shows the transformation he has gone through and how he regards imperialism:

I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure that they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of danger it its unable to comprehend. I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their face, so full of stupid importance. (HoD 93)

The quotation above shows how people are acting according to the will of the super-ego. Some people believe what they are told and do not question the prevailing order of the society while others obey the super-ego against their own will. In Africa Marlow has experienced how dangerous it is with a strong super-ego and how people handle a dominant super-ego when distanced from it. A strong super-ego leads to egos who have not been given the opportunity to develop as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: The Outer Station, the Central Station and the Ego

When the journey starts, Marlow soon understands that his suspicion about the company will be confirmed. On the way to the outer station he sees things that he reacts strongly to. He is a witness to how black people are called enemies and criminals in order to justify shooting at them and taking them as slaves. The values of Victorian society are set aside. The colonizers do not work at all since the work is left to the natives; imported machinery is rusting and still everybody is trying to keep up appearances.

In this chapter I will show how the egos of the colonialists are pressed between the super-ego and the id. According to Freud, the ego is the part of an individual's consciousness that deals with reality: "The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions" (Freud 364). The colonizers live a deprived life and have to find strategies to deal with the situation and carry out the tasks given to them. One way is pretending that one actually is doing well, another is to shut out all feelings and a third is racism. The difficulties for individuals to adapt to the system are explained by Joel Kovel "the exigencies of modern production, with its increasing routine and bureaucracy, impose the icy hand of rationalization over human existence" (Kovel 217).

Different strategies of adapting to the situation are illustrated to the readers through different characters that Marlow meets. One example is the accountant who handles things as if still in Brussels and when a sick person is carried into his hut he states: "The groans of this sick person, he said, distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate" (HoD 21). The opposite way to handle the situation is exemplified by the explorers who look for areas where a lot of ivory can be found. They are happy to let go of the super-ego but have not developed any restraints or grown-up manners: "there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world" (HoD 37).

Marlow's childhood dream to sail up the great river came true. He has taken on an engagement but not given much thought to how things might be run. He is a sailor and has assumed it would be business as usual. Marlow discovers the double standards of the colonizers and the brutal methods that are being used. His assignment turns into a quest where he has to deal with his new knowledge without becoming ill. He buries himself in work and dissociates himself from the colonialists in order to escape the reality: "When you have to attend to things of that sort, the mere incidents of the surface, the reality - the reality, I tell you - fades. The inner truth is hidden - luckily, luckily" (HoD 43). Marlow's situation is well explained by John Krapp, who describes Marlow as "of a different class. This difference will manifest itself in his ability to think morally, an ability that is allowed by ambivalence towards imperialism. The specifically moral structure of Marlow's ambivalence lies in the deepest register of his consciousness in the form of an internal pedagogic dialogue between European imperialist

ethics and something else” (Krapp 107). The quotation shows that Marlow is equipped with a different kind of super-ego from the colonisers that is well integrated in his true self. Here begins his inner and outer journey and he becomes one of those described as “isolates”. Conrad has no alternative proposal to what could replace imperialism and he solves this by letting a large part of the novel take place within Marlow’s consciousness. Marlow wrestles with ethical questions and carries on a dialogue with the reader. In this way Marlow is both narrator and main character. This creates a haze, which makes the criticism against imperialism less obvious, since it is not clear if it is Conrad or Marlow who is being critical. It is Marlow’s thoughts but the reader can glimpse Conrad behind the words. The ambiguity of Marlow’s feelings becomes very clear in the sentence, “Fine fellows – cannibals – in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them” (HoD 44). He expresses a racist view, while at the same time praising the “cannibals”. Here it becomes very obvious that Marlow struggles to find a balance between preconceived notions and his own judgement. The injustices Marlow discovers make him question the prevailing orders.

In capitalistic societies, the ego is the king. In order to succeed, feelings for other people need to be shut out and this can lead to racism. Joel Kovel explains this well:

A system driven by competition and self-aggrandizement is conducive to establish in each person a principle setting the self over and against all other. The same self-aggrandizement and the non-recognition of the other comprises the nuclear attitude of racism. Of course, capitalism’s ego does not automatically turn racist. It will do so only under special circumstances, when its identity is destabilized and social dislocations threaten further collapse. (Kovel 219)

In the quotation above we can see that racism fulfils a purpose. When there is failure in a capitalistic society, blaming the misfortunes on those different from us is a common way of trying to solve the problem. In times of prosperity, racism is less explicit. Racism exists everywhere in the world, not only in Western Europe, but for different reasons. Often, it is a method for people to justify the exploitation of others without feeling guilty and a way for the ego to deal with reality. By classifying some people as inferior, the ego can justify ill treatment of them.

In “An Image of Africa” Chinua Achebe accuses Joseph Conrad of being “a thoroughgoing racist” (Achebe 257) and “a purveyor of comforting myths” (Achebe 253) but at the same time he admits, “Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation” (Achebe 262). These comments illustrate the ambiguity the reader may sense in *Heart of Darkness*. This ambiguity is based on contradictions such as that between “the merry dance of death and trade” (HoD 16) and “there was a vast amount of red – good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done there” (HoD 10). These statements are ambiguous to us since we know from history what terrible crimes were committed in the

colonies, no matter what country was governing the area. Achieving this knowledge is a part of Marlow's inner journey and the readers are invited to join him on this journey.

At the time the novel was written, racism as we know it today did not exist. The superiority of the white man was not yet questioned. Racism existed only as a biological science. There was an interest in investigating physical features in relation to crime, intelligence, mental illness etc. Considering the historical background, *Heart of Darkness* is anything but comforting. Throughout the novel, we sense an uneasiness, created by Conrad's skilful narrative technique. He certainly gives the readers enough facts and ideas, yet he leaves us with a feeling that he has left the most horrible parts to be imagined by the readers. As Cedric Watts correctly observes:

Far from being 'a purveyor of comforting myths', Conrad most deliberately and incisively debunks such myths. The myth of inevitable progress, for example; the myth that white civilization is necessarily morally superior to 'savagery'; the myth that imperialism is the altruistic matter of 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways'; all these are mocked by the tale. (Watts 197)

Achebe wonders whether "a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalized a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art" (Achebe 257). To him of course the answer is no, but this may be disputed. It is not only the black people who are dehumanized. Marlow and Kurtz are the only two characters in the novel that are given names. The others are described by their professions, what status they have, and so on. Conrad is not telling an adventure story; instead he presents psychological explanations to nasty chapters in the history of mankind. In my view, one of the main purposes with the novel is to condemn the crimes that white people committed in Africa. An explicit example of this is the passage where Marlow by mistake walks into a grove, encountering some of the workers:

They were dying slowly – it was clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, – nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, they sickened, became inefficient and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. (HoD 19)

In commenting on this passage Achebe implies that British liberalists are touched by this passage, but that they nevertheless refuse to see blacks and whites as equal. Cedric Watts is perhaps right when he remarks: "The blacks have enough enemies; it is saddening to see Achebe attack one of their friends" (Watts 197).

Achebe also criticizes Conrad's description of blacks and states that "we are given this nice little vignette as an example of things in their place" (Achebe 3).

Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks – these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for there. They were a great comfort to look at. (HoD 15)

This passage is the only one in the novel that describes contented people. In my opinion Conrad gives this picture to the readers as a contrast to all the pictures of people, both black and white,

in the wrong places. Conrad tries to show that people who are moved from their natural environment to something they do not comprehend become isolated and lost, and this applies to whites much more than to blacks. There are several examples in the novel of black people who have been deprived of their traditional way of living but who are not able to comprehend those of the white men. So clearly the description of blacks behaving oddly when doing what whites force them to, is not racist at all, but strong criticism of the whites. As Ian Watt observes: “Imperial or colonial experience is disastrous for the whites: it makes them lazy: it reveals their weaknesses; it puffs them up with empty vanity at being white, and it fortifies the intolerable hypocrisy with which Europeans in general conceal selfish aims” (Watt 159).

Marlow’s ego has matured due to his experiences in the colonies and he wants to discuss his ambiguous feelings with his friends on board *The Nellie*. He is about to explain to them how he came to choose Kurtz and how in the end he would end up lying. While at the central station, he decides to live on board the boat he has to repair. This sets him further aside from the other people at the station. Marlow looks forward to meeting Kurtz whom he believes has managed to fulfil the task of doing business in a noble way. Marlow has read what he has written and thinks highly of him. He asks his friends “Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation” (HoD 33).

The meeting with Kurtz is postponed in order to give the readers time to change their views along with Marlow, but as a remark on what happens during the journey, Asif Ali Akhtar argues: “It would appear at this point of the journey the figure of Kurtz begins to take on the overarching role of the Freudian ‘super-ego’, hierarchically placed above in a resounding position of infallible authority” (Akhtar 42). I rather see it as Marlow’s ego sets his hopes on Kurtz. The feeling that things are wrong comes from the bottom of Marlow’s heart and since he is isolated he hopes that Kurtz has managed to find solutions to the problems.

Chapter Three: The inner station and the Id

Finally, the rescue party sets off to the inner station to search for Kurtz. The party consists of Marlow, a helmsman, a polesman, a fireman and twenty “cannibals”. On board are, in addition to the crew, several pilgrims and the manager. They are going deep into the country and Marlow needs to navigate through waters that are totally unknown to him.

The unknown land and waters can be seen as the unconscious. At the same time as Marlow is navigating through unknown waters, he is also navigating through unknown areas within himself. According to Freud the id is the psychological energy connected to the unconscious and “[w]e see however, that we have two different kinds of unconscious – the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious” (Freud 335).

In this chapter my aim is to explain what may happen to the characters presented in Conrad’s novel who lack self-knowledge and restraint when left alone in Africa and how truths hidden even to the characters can be revealed and lead to horrible experiences.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the steamboat penetrates the unknown land. On the way, Marlow’s dislike for the Europeans increases and he longs to meet Kurtz, to talk to him, to finally have a proper discussion with someone who hopefully shares his values. However, along the way the expedition is delayed. The steamboat is being attacked and the rescue party understand that they are not welcomed. Asif Ali Akhtar describes the steamboat as “the very metaphor for enlightened consciousness rowing through the contours of an all-too-primitive mind” (Akhtar 42). This is not how I understand the function of the steamboat. In my opinion, the steamboat represents a super-ego that trespasses into an ego/id without having been invited or even wanted, but instead is undesired. Kurtz has not asked for help, instead he has been avoiding his fellow countrymen for some time. Natives have been delivering the ivory from the inner station. The company people at the central station suspect that Kurtz has fallen ill. Thus the steamboat, from Kurtz’ point of view, is not a rescue party but rather an expedition to bring him back against his will.

Already before meeting Kurtz, Marlow learns from him. Marlow understands that Kurtz has been fighting his own demons but failed. This puts Marlow on guard and this is what in the end saves him from making the wrong choices. Marlow learns about Kurtz through a young Russian sailor called the Harlequin, who is the first person he meets at the inner station. The Harlequin speaks vividly about Kurtz, telling him what a wonderful person he is but he becomes silent and hesitating when Marlow asks about the conditions at the station. Marlow reflects, “It was curious to see his mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz” (HoD 73). Again, we see the ambiguity in the novel and here it regards Kurtz, what his intentions have been and what he has become: Kurtz has succumbed to greed and a lust for power. The meeting with the Harlequin prepares both Marlow and the reader for finally meeting Kurtz.

As the reader, along with Marlow, learns more about Kurtz it becomes clear that he lacks self-knowledge and restraint and Marlow has by now realized that Kurtz has not been able to carry out his intentions. Marlow is at first horror-struck at Kurtz' situation, but when the manager talks about unsound methods and that the time was not yet ripe for these kinds of methods, he again changes his opinions. Marlow chooses to be Kurtz' ally since he is in Marlow's opinion the less evil of the two. He knows that Kurtz has come out with the best of intentions but failed. For the manager, on the other hand, the talk about making improvements contains lies and pretence. Marlow understands that the manager is a hypocrite who would use any means to earn money while Kurtz has given in to repressed urges unknown to himself and Kurtz is struck by a destiny described by Ian Watt as a

common kind of human destiny which illustrated the obvious discrepancy between the ideal of Western civilisation, and the degradation which it suffered in Africa; and in this context *Heart of Darkness* is unique in being the first to connect the process of "going fantree" with an even more general consequence of the colonial situation: the fact that the individual colonist's power, combined with the lack of any effective control, was an open invitation to every kind of cruelty and abuse. (Watt 145)

Marlow is given few opportunities to speak with Kurtz, to hear his voice and to comprehend what has happened to him. They speak briefly as Kurtz is carried on board. Later, Kurtz manages to crawl back into the jungle. Marlow discovers this and goes ashore on his own, convincing him to come back. Kurtz is a complex character who has great plans and visions about what he wants to achieve. He fails due to lack of self-knowledge. He has not been brought up to be on guard towards his own weaknesses.

When reading *Heart of Darkness* it is easy to think of Marlow as an alias for Conrad. However, Marlow is ambivalent in his attitude towards imperialism and also towards the natives. He reveals himself, at least by our measurements as a racist. Kurtz, on the other hand, aligns with the natives and joins a tribe. Perhaps, a part of Conrad can be seen in Kurtz. Kurtz wants to understand the natives and to join their way of life but he becomes trapped between the two worlds. Marlow describes his state in the following way: "There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth" (HoD 87).

Kurtz' quest has turned into horror. His intention had been to enlighten the natives while at the same time make money. Conrad writes about "unspeakable rites", but the reader is never informed about what rites take place. Could it be that the rites were not that terrible but our ignorance makes them seem that way. What is clear is that Kurtz did not align totally with the natives. He let go of all restraints of the Western world but he did not implement the restraints of the tribe. Instead, he uses weapons against those tribe members that he calls rebels and puts up their heads on poles around his house. This could certainly be called unspeakable rites. The tribe members worship him, but we do not know why. Kurtz may have helped them as he intended to but it can also be that he had weapons that they have never seen before. Kurtz keeps

raiding the country for ivory and delivers as much as all the other agents put together, but he does not deliver the ivory himself since he is afraid to meet his fellow countrymen. They would have recognized his madness and sent him back to Belgium. When given the chance of total power Kurt cannot resist taking it. He knows it is wrong but he gives in to an urge for power that is hidden in his unconscious. He is not himself aware that he is able to commit this kind of deeds. When he speaks the famous words “The Horror! The Horror” (HoD 91) they do not refer to traditions and customs of the natives but rather to what he has discovered within himself and what he is capable of. Marlow refers to his words as “a judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth” (HoD 91). He struggles with guilt but still he cannot give up the exhilaration of total power. This is why he crawls back to the tribe after the rescue party has carried him on-board the steamboat. In the end Marlow rescues Kurtz, but Kurtz dies on the way back to the central station.

Marlow struggles to complete his own quest. He becomes dejected when he realizes the extent of Kurtz’ failure. For a while he thinks everything is meaningless. On the way back Marlow also falls ill and nearly dies but in the end he finds the strength to recover. He wants to get back to Europe and give his version of the events and he states, “but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced” (HoD 46). Kurtz has entrusted him with letters, papers and documents. He sees it as completion of his quest and as an act of loyalty to Kurtz to deliver these documents to the right persons. The last person he meets is Kurtz’ Intended but this meeting is not going according to his plan. Marlow lies to her.

The lie to Kurtz’ Intended is one of the most debated paragraphs in *Heart of Darkness*. Philip V. Allingham accuses Marlow of belonging to “those devious political and commercial interests who are keeping the middle-class consciousness from apprehending the European exploitation of Africa for what it is: a cultural, economic and geographical rape” (Allingham). This is partly true. Marlow cannot bring himself to tell her the truth and in doing so he contributes to preserving the situation in the colonies. However, it seems to me that Conrad chooses this turn in the book for good reasons. When readers finish reading the novel their focus is still in the jungle and the events there although Marlow has returned to Brussels. If Marlow had told the Intended the truth and she had become even more devastated, the reader’s focus would have changed from Africa to sympathize with her and her grief. The novel would have suggested that Kurtz and the Intended are victims. In a way they are victims but the real victims would have been forgotten and the novel would have been more of an adventure story with a tragic love-story ending. Since Marlow lies, the focus of the reader is still on the terrible things happening in Africa. A third option was open to Conrad, in my opinion, and that is having Marlow come back and protesting about what happens in Africa. Then the novel would have been seen as propaganda and again it would have been easier for the reader to ally with Europeans. In the way it is written now he shows us how we ourselves contribute to the “merry

dance of death and trade” (HoD 16) every day. He is doing this without too much accusation. The reader is allowed to think for himself/herself and is able to take a standpoint and this is a far more intelligent and diplomatic way to go about this issue. The reader who reads the novel well indeed understands the message but without feeling pressured.

Even if Conrad and Marlow share many attributes, *Heart of Darkness* is not an autobiography. In real life, Conrad after returning from his trip to the Congo Free State took part in forming the Congo Reform Association. They worked hard for four years after which King Leopold II had to hand over Congo to the Belgian Country.

This chapter shows how difficult tasks could bring out deficiencies in individuals who have not been able mature into true adults. They commit terrible mistakes since they lack self-knowledge and are not aware of their own weaknesses.

But the wilderness had found [Kurtz] out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with the great solitude – and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. (HoD 75)

Conclusion

This essay studied *Heart of Darkness* from a Freudian psychological perspective. Colonization is discussed from the perspectives of the super-ego, the ego and the id in an attempt to show that Conrad wished to explain the psychological mechanisms behind colonization in Africa and what could happen to people in the system if they took on assignments without having the maturity and self-knowledge needed. A further purpose is to show that Conrad wanted his readers to reflect over colonization and the crimes committed in the colonies by inviting the readers to join the protagonist on his journey and allowing the readers to change their minds along with the protagonist. Racism is also discussed in the essay, although racism as we acknowledge it today did not exist at the time the novel was published.

According to Conrad, art should not be too obvious, but should make readers reflect over the problems presented. This makes *Heart of Darkness* ambiguous. Some readers might miss the message but, on the other hand, the work would not be rejected as propaganda. Since the protagonist reflects over the problem in the novel and has ambiguous feelings, the readers are allowed to feel the same. This is an intelligent way to handle a difficult question as it creates a discussion rather than forcing the readers to take a standpoint. In my opinion, there is no doubt that Conrad was critical towards colonialism. The citizens of Europe were not informed about how business was run in the colonies and *Heart of Darkness* was a way to enlighten them.

The essay showed how Conrad wanted his readers to reflect over colonialism and imperialism, how it affects the oppressed but also the oppressors. At the time the novel was written, the social pressure on the individual was strong, i.e. people lived with a strong super-ego. This made them lack self-knowledge and restraint, two very important qualities for surviving in an unfamiliar environment. The essay puts forward explanations for what could happen to these people when distanced from the super-ego. Some colonizers dealt with the situation as if still in Europe, others became mentally ill or insane while another sort of individuals proved to be able to commit horrible crimes on account of lacking restraint and self-knowledge.

Was Conrad a racist? In my opinion the answer is both yes and no. He lived in a time when white people were regarded as superior, not only by themselves, but also by everybody else. However, with this superiority came a responsibility to look out for the less fortunate. When this responsibility was neglected, Conrad was very harsh in his criticism.

The essay has analysed the novel in connection with colonialism and racism with an attempt to give a more balanced view than some of the novel's earlier critics, for example, Achebe and Akhtar. In my view Cedric Watts, Ian Watt and also Frances B. Singh have understood the purpose with the novel.

Had Conrad hoped that his novel should have affected us even more? Conrad was a very modest man and I am sure he would be pleased that his novel is still discussed but I think even today he would have a lot to say about how people in the developing world are treated by Western countries. We exploit the developing world in an economic way, which prevents these countries from progressing and we are doing this for our own benefit. To apply *Heart of Darkness* to the way modern companies are doing business in Africa would in my opinion be a very interesting topic for future essays. Such work may show that *Heart of Darkness* is as important today as when it was written.

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